

Auli Palosaari  
Art teacher

**It was spectacular!**

**Pupil's fire-sculpture delighted at Easter  
2006**



1. Easter Fire by pupils.

Easter Saturday was anticipated more excitedly than normal in Kokkola's Isokylä.

The school's general and special needs eldest pupils had a festive school day on Easter Saturday. Before they were allowed access to the delicious food on offer, they had to complete and stack the fire-sculpture. With a force of nearly 70 pupils in squelchy boots, the modules of the fire-sculpture were carried over to Nynäs Park to await the culmination of the evening, the ignition.

The "Kokoo koko kokko" cultural heritage and fine arts project that had lasted all late winter was nearly ready. The celebration is a way of building and supporting the community as well as collaborative work.



2. Collaborative work.

The fire-sculpture took a new form in its final stage. Still on Maundy Thursday, at the test stacking, two spruce trees were assembled side by side out of twelve triangles, in the final version the trees were arranged in a line, barely touching each other. With this solution we wanted to make sure that the piece of art had enough strength to burn. It did indeed have that, hundreds of spectators mentioned on the Saturday evening.



3. Sculpturing in a large scale.

Teacher Kari Hienovirta told us how he noticed the public go quiet just before the ignition of the sculpture and then flurried when the geometrical shapes started to take form in the fire. *'It was spectacular, and made by children!'*, stated Hienovirta. Similar things were said about the over all successful project by other participating students and the other teachers, Tuula Kelloloski, Mia Källström-Harju and Tuula Pohjonen.



4. The sculpture was built in elements.

The teachers thought the project was a successful merit for the special needs and general teaching collaboration.

Although Practice Education (EHA1, school for slightly handicapped) and general education have been in the same yard for years, there has never been any collaboration before.

The Art project was a suitable tool for starting social communication and interaction. The pupils assessed both the process and the final outcome and discussed the art concept: does a piece of art have to be a permanent monument or is an experience enough for a person?



5. Interaction in a wood workshop.

The art of the moment puzzled the pupils but the burning of the fire- sculpture was regarded as a "neat" experience. Afterwards the pupils thought that it was worth burning the piece of work although beforehand it felt

slightly sad to give up a few months hard work.



6. Process in practise.

There were hundreds of photographs and several video snippets left from the process of which a CD was assembled for each participant as a furthermore recollection to that of the experience recorded on the retina and in the memory.

The pupil's parents took part in the assessment of the project by answering the survey that was sent to them and the pupils in their own assessment debate at school. In the surveys that were returned, the project was viewed among other things as *“aesthetic, magnificent, fine, interesting, joyful, one that develops hand skills, one to open up the educational contents of fine arts, one to increase co-operation, a refreshing variation and modern action to break the schools' routines”*.

The parents had also according to the feedback noticed the patient and goal-driven work and assessed the publicity it got:

*“What a great idea!, Much work had gone into it!*

*“It was very tasteful and skilfully done! The pupils of the school got positive publicity through the fire-sculpture in the press, radio and television.”*

*“It was mentioned in the feedback forms that the fire-sculpture had an effect of connecting the village. There was a feeling of a vibrant village society.”*

### **The process is important**



7. Teacher demonstration.

With the aim of socio-cultural encouragement a type of work was needed where all the school- children of the same age group could equally work together. As well as challenging the school's pupils from

parallel forms and the teachers, the community surrounding the school has been challenged: the homes, the villagers, the town, the University of the Third age and the University of Lapland's faculty of arts .

The project was managed by Auli Palosaari, student of arts as part of supplement schooling for fine arts, "Arts exercise". Lecturer Maria Huhmarniemi from the University of Lapland's faculty of arts also came to Kokkola to educate the teachers in environmental and communal art.

### The Isokylä area has changed

In art educational projects the practice on environmental art is collaborative work where apart from physical efforts also social skills are polished. One aims to understand others experiences and to search for common solutions. The project started with researching the area. The Isokylä area has changed from a rural village into a suburb of a town where the neighbours no longer know each other. According to the new design plan another 400 new house sites are still to come to the area.

With the building work, a big area of the field and woodland surrounding the school will be lost, currently used as an area for children's exercise and a place for the

traditional burning of the Easter bonfire.

Lead by their teachers Marja Wargh and Aira Salovaara the schoolchildren thought of what a good educational surrounding consists of. As well as considering the importance of the field and wasteland for the school and the village, it was also questioned what drives people together, for example to the Easter bonfire.

Also what is a good meeting point for the villagers was worth thinking about.

The special needs pupils and the pupils from the third form took a stand on the new Isokylä scheme, as the ground use and building law require the real users of the area to speak up despite of their age.

The fine arts teaching scheme encourages collaboration with the town planner and the architect among others.



8. Pupils opinions in a newspaper.

## The track of time

In the second stage of the process the course of time was reversed with the guidance of Auli Palosaari and Tuula Pohjonen. The task for the children was to gather cultural heritage. As well as interviewing the students of the University of Third Age also the eldest family members were asked about bonfire experiences. Exciting information was recorded in the interviews:

in the old days potatoes were cooked on the end of a stick in Ylivieska and Sievi.



9. Generations were meeting in a process and many people got a voice in their community.

In the same days in the Swedish speaking town Pietarsaari children already got home-made chocolate sweets. In Toholampi and Himanka stock found when clearing the field was burnt as well as old boats. Turnips were cooked in the cinders.

In many places the bonfire was stacked with burnable domestic waste, the like of Christmas trees, straw from mattresses and stalks of “lehtikerppu” that were fed to the sheep in the winter.

It is not certain what was used later on as burning material for the bonfires; a lady told us her brother burnt all their mother’s hand-woven rugs as they weren’t in fashion anymore in the 1970’s. She recalls that in those days things were put in the bonfire as a means of cleaning the environment, car tyres and other smokey materials. The smoke was meant to be seen in the neighbouring village.

Elvi and Ralf Porko remember that the bonfire tradition wasn’t easily interrupted as even in the winter of the war when bonfires were burnt in Pietarsaari, the enemies bombed Pietarsaari believing that it was Vaasa due to all the lights.

Mayday or midsummer bonfires have not traditionally been burnt in central Ostrobothnia, the Ostrobothnian bonfire is linked in particular with the coming of the spring, cleaning of the garden area and with Easter.

## **A valuable matter**

The students of the University of third age were pleased to collaborate with the school. Elvi Löhönen, Ritva Silander and Anni Kuusansalo came to see the working process of the fire- sculpture at the school on Maundy Thursday and took part in the celebration and exhibitions on Easter Saturday. Retired teacher Elvi Löhönen mentions that *the children have driven a valuable matter.*

Ritva Silander praises *the children's professional way of interviewing and how thoroughly they listened to the stories of the elderly.*

- *Children are skilled when they are given the opportunity,* Silander mentions.

*“The older population also needs opportunities”*, that is why the idea of art in the suburb for all ages brought forward by Kirkonmäki residential association is a very good thing to her.

Anni Kuusansalo tells that she has seen bonfires in Isokylä since 1970's but she has only familiarized herself with the environment and communal art through this fire-sculpture project.

Anni Kuusansalo praises the opportunity of people of all ages working together.

Emerita “Wanha Kalle”, the cultural person of Kokkola, Anna-Liisa Bjon sees *all this time and effort dedicated to the children to pay back with interest.*

*According to her this kind of activity is in its biggest extent a way of preventing discrimination and encouraging communal responsibility of citizens of all ages.* She said she was delighted to come and see the burning of the fire- sculpture again in the evening.

Ritva Silander thought *it was a good idea to set light to the fire- sculpture when the traditional bonfire of Kirkonmäki residents association was already going out. That emphasised the aesthetic experience of the fire- sculpture.*

Silander thought that *everybody watched, holding their breaths, this art of the moment which remained a lifelong experience to all spectators.*



*10. ‘It was spectacular, and made by children!’*

## Art to the suburb

The art happening at Easter was meant to bring attention not only to fine art education at school but also to bring art to people who wouldn't visit museums or galleries. This is why Joni Virtanen, a photographer from Isokylä hung up his exhibition in the school's bomb shelter to delight the audience. He has captured his pictures on his nightly cycle-rides when the town is asleep.

Retired teacher Sirkka Hokkanen praised Virtanen's exhibition. To her, the lightboxes displayed in the dark room were a new experience.

Although the pictures were new they reminded her of 70 year old memories. She recalls that *the birch trunks in the darkness as she sat next to her father in the sleigh looked exactly the same as in Virtanen's pictures*. Hokkanen said she would willingly come to those exhibitions which are held outside the town center. That way she would familiarize herself with the town.

Apart from the photographic exhibition at the public occasion, displayed were also pictures of the fire- sculpture process taken by the children and literate interviews of bonfire experiences by senior citizens. K.H. Renlund's museum also contributed to the Easter happening in Isokylä with an

exhibition of Easter traditions that reached tens of spectators at the school.

The lecturer of the museum, Lauri Skantsi presented the exhibition to the pupils already earlier in the Easter week.



11. Exhibition of Easter traditions and fire-sculpture process.



12. Experiences and opinions were collected from visitors.

### **The cultural journey continues**

The students of the University of third age were asking for continuation to the collaborative work. You will come up with something, they asked. I promised we would. We are also obliged to do so by our new teaching scheme, which is going back in time; the school must not be an external link to the community. It is important to listen to the older generation even if us humans have the urge to invent something new all the time. My aim was to bring the teaching scheme of fine arts to homes and to those who teach fine arts by concrete action and cultural heritage subject entities that make different teaching contents whole. I find that I reached my goal in doing this.

As Jokela & Hiltunen & Huhmarniemi & Valkonen say in their web book Art, Community and Environment:  
“Culture can be regarded in many ways. It can be seen as a great lifeless power that makes people act in the same way from generation to generation. Culture can also be seen as a constantly changing and re-born collective phenomenon which expresses the creative qualities of humans.

Man is a storyteller. Life itself is also a kind of a narrative, which gets new dimensions every day. Narratives and traditions are handed down from one generation to another, from family to family. They are still an important part of our roots. The English word ‘knowledge’ has its origin in the words know legends . In other words, to know the stories of our ancestors.”

We need these stories not only for knowledge but also as building blocks for skills.



13. Auli Palosaari, the project leader, in a workshop.